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SUBJECT: VP ATIKU ON UPCOMING ELECTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4. (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Vice President Atiku Abubakar expressed confidence in a meeting with the Ambassador on February 8, looking forward to the upcoming campaign. He said, though, that he had been worried about an attack or arrest a week earlier and had been obliged to move to an undisclosed location for several days in order to safeguard the documents which he claimed provided proof of the expenditure of 2.8 billion dollars by President Obasanjo to purchase arms outside the budgetary restraints. He assessed his opponents, saying PDP candidate Yar'Adua could not win a single state and ANPP candidate Buhari looked "tired" and was unable to raise cash for his campaign. Atiku's confidence belies his single greatest hurdle, that of getting on the ballot before the 2007 elections. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Vice President Atiku Abubakar met with Ambassador and PolCouns on February 8 and expressed his confidence ahead of the 2007 elections. He was much more upbeat than during our previous meeting before Christmas but was in a curious mood, referring to several developments in a less formal fashion than has been his habit.

¶3. (C) Atiku said that he had been concerned about his safety a week earlier and, shortly after disclosing the expenditure of 2.8 billion dollars for arms "in order to pacify the Delta," he had been forced to move out of his official residence. He said he had been worried about an attack or arrest in the wake of the disclosures when Presidential spokesmen had accused him of "treason" for discussing the expenditures. Atiku said he has documents, authorized by President Obasanjo, directing NNPC director Funsho Kupolokun to divert the funds from NNPC and cover them under the NNPC's "overhead" budget. "This is a blatant disregard of the budgetary process and removes oversight from the National Assembly," he complained. Further, he claimed that this was the primary method by which the President and his aides funnel money to their various projects, including the bribery of National Assembly and party members and financing the PDP campaign machinery.

¶4. (C) Atiku went on to assess his opponents in the upcoming Presidential race. He described PDP candidate Umaru Yar'Adua as unpopular and unknown and said that the PDP ticket would be unable "to win even a single state in the North." He described Vice Presidential candidate Goodluck Jonathan as another non-performer and claimed that he would be unable to win "his own Bayelsa state." While he did not think the President would substitute for the candidates, Atiku did say

that Obasanjo was extremely concerned by the party's prospects. He pointed to the security incidents in the Southwest and in Port Harcourt and the examples of crowds attacking the Presidential party in Nasarawa, Bauchi, and Kaduna states during the campaign launches.

15. (C) Atiku described ANPP candidate Muhammadu Buhari as popular but lacking in political savvy. He said that Buhari looked "tired," and wondered about his health. "They have talked about typhoid or malaria or something," Atiku said. He claimed that Buhari's organization was unable to raise cash for his campaign and said that talks were continuing on the oft-touted alliance between Buhari's ANPP and Atiku's AC parties.

16. (C) COMMENT: Atiku's complaints about breaches of constitutionality by this (his) regime may well be founded on serious concerns, but they are also coming to light now primarily for his own political considerations. While Atiku's confidence was greater during this meeting, it belies his single greatest hurdle: getting on the ballot before the 2007 elections. Atiku, working assiduously to realize his ambitions, will continue to analyze the situation in a fashion favorable to his own campaign, but his assessment of Yar'Adua and the PDP tracks with that of many other observers and could signal problems for President Obasanjo's desire to control the Nigerian political scene for the next generation.

END COMMENT.  
CAMPBELL